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ABSTRACT

Teacher and peer ratings of 37 mainstreamed educationally handicapped (EH) elementary aged children and 37 non-EH controls were analyzed according to the Rochester Teacher and Peer Rating Scales' independent behavioral competence factors and combined teacher-peer integrated behavioral competence domains. Results indicated significant differences between EH and non-EH groups for the behavioral domains of academic problem solving abilities and social normative skills. (Author/CL)

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TEACHER AND PEER OBSERVATIONS OF MAINSTREAMED ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PUPILS: A COMPARATIVE GROUP STUDY

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TEACHER AND PEER OBSERVATIONS OF MAINSTREAMED ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PUPILS: A COMPARATIVE GROUP STUDY

Teacher and peer ratings of 37 mainstreamed educationally handicapped children (EH) and 37 non-educationally handicapped controls (NEH) were analyzed according to the Rochester Teacher and Peer Rating Scales' independent behavioral competence factors and combined teacher-peer integrated behavioral competence domains. As expected, these ratings significantly differentiated between groups.

This particular study is Part II of a four-phase cross-sectional research project. Each phase examines and compares the development of children identified as educationally handicapped with their non-educationally handicapped peers on measures of interpersonal concepts (social reasoning) and/or interpersonal competencies (social relating).

Part I comprised a structural-developmental analysis of the subjects' conceptions about persons, dyadic friendships, and peer group organization. A social perspective taking framework provided a model for assessing children's developing conceptions of the relation between self and other(s).

Part II was an analysis of teacher and peer observations of these children. Assessment of behavioral competence was based upon a social systems model.

Part III is a comparative group examination of the relationship between interpersonal concepts and competencies. These analyses are now in process.

Part IV, a classroom observational study of targeted children whose behaviors have been assessed as competent, at risk, and super-competent is projected for Spring, 1979.

This comparative group study (Part II) of teacher and peer observations will be described according to: 1) the context of assessment- i.e., school, classrooms and subjects selected for study; 2) the method of assessment- i.e., scales and profiling system which provided reliable tools for measuring school-related behavioral competence; and 3) the results of assessment- i.e., findings that provided criterion-referenced or concurrent validation for the Rochester Teacher and Peer Rating Scales' function in discriminating between mainstreamed educationally handicapped and their non-educationally handicapped peers.

CONTEXT OF ASSESSMENT

The unique aspects of the Holcomb Learning Center (HLC), State University College, Geneseo, New York, are its laboratory school functions, semi-rural setting, and high proportions of children of college faculty and other professionals. There is also a high proportion of mainstreamed, special education pupils. Twenty percent of the total school population in grades 1-6 received special tutorial or small group services for part of each day from qualified special education personnel. For the remainder of the day the pupils attend age-appropriate family classrooms. Services include reading, math, speech and language

tutorials and/or perceptual and gross motor training in small groups. Amount of service received depends upon the severity or multiplicity of each child's educational handicap. The categories of handicap include physical, speech and language, deafness, hard of hearing, visual perception, emotional disturbance, and other health impairments (OHI). Eighty-eight percent of the designated EH population at the HLC were included in this study. Fifty-two percent of these were from the OHI group. (These children may be designated as learning disabled in other school districts.) Twenty-seven percent were categorized as speech and language impaired; nineteen percent, physically handicapped.

The NEH controls were pair-matched on sex, chronological age (within four months), and IQ (within ten points). All but two pairs of subjects were at the same graded levels in their assigned family classrooms.

METHOD OF ASSESSMENT

The model underlying the Rochester Teacher Rating Scale (RTRS) and Rochester Peer Rating Scale (RPRS) assumes that school-related behaviors or competencies are viewed and affected by the most significant others within each particular setting or classroom, and that norms for these behaviors are defined within that setting. The RTRS, a 26 item checklist, yields four independent, replicated, and reliable dimensions: Cognitive Competence, Social Competence, Social Compliance, and Motivation (3). The RPRS, a 23 item sociometric-like procedure, yields an

additional four independent, replicated, and reliable dimensions: Brightness/Compliance, Dullness, Friendliness, and Intrusiveness (4). Each item has been empirically derived from a large pool of classroom-relevant items so that the dimensions are natural to the social system within which the child is being studied. A detailed computer program has been developed for converting factored dimensions into standard scores in order to facilitate within and across class comparisons for the conduct of both longitudinal and cross-sectional studies (4). Together the scales provide an easily administered set of instruments for assessing and analyzing teacher and peer observations.

The scales are presently being used in the University of Rochester Child and Family Study to assess longitudinally, school related competence of children at psychiatric risk (1,2). Rubenstein and Fisher (4) have suggested a variety of other ways the competence ratings might be used in the study of children "at risk", including those who are physically, emotionally, or intellectually handicapped; and/or in the study of psychological or educational classroom interventions.

Both scales were administered during January, 1978 in the nine elementary classrooms at the Holcomb Learning Center. Teachers rated each child relative to classroom peers. Selected college students were trained to administer the sociometric-like schedule to each of the pupils with the exception of the deaf and hard of hearing. Analyses have been completed for the EH males and pair-matched controls.

RESULTS OF ASSESSMENT

A series of t-tests were run for teacher and peer ratings of overall competence and each of the eight independent dimensions. For the 48 males, overall teacher and peer competence ratings significantly differentiated between the EH and NEH children ($t = 4.09$ and 4.58, $p < .001$). Significant differences between groups were found on three independent teacher dimensions: Cognitive Competence ($t = 5.25$, $p < .001$), Motivation ($t = 4.64$, $p < .001$), and Social Competence ($t = 2.33$, $p < .05$). In addition, significance was reached for three independent peer dimensions: Brightness/Compliance ($t = 4.00$, $p < .001$), Dullness ($t = 2.90$, $p < .01$), and Friendliness ($t = 2.30$, $p < .05$).

The rule-following variables, teacher rated Social Compliance and peer rated Intrusiveness, did not reveal significant differences between groups. A review of mean differences and low range scores reveals that both groups were similar on these dimensions. It would appear that the child who does not adhere to rules or comply to standards within the school setting may be a member of either of the studied groups. One could speculate that non-compliance may be taken for "assertiveness" and viewed as a positive rather than a negative child characteristic.

The correlation for teacher and peer overall competence was moderately high ($r = .62$, $p < .001$). This appears to indicate the relative consistency with which both teachers and peers view children within the mainstreamed classroom context. An

interesting question arises as to how these children would be viewed outside their family classrooms.

Following these analyses, teacher and peer ratings were combined to yield separate but integrated behavioral domains. The breakdown and procedures for establishing these domains were based upon the Fisher and Jones (2) rationale for summarizing the eight child variables into domain indicies. Rather than maintaining the original three domains of Problem Solving, Social Emotional, and Normative, they were collapsed into two domains. This breakdown was made in order to differentiate between two aspects of school-related competence: Academic Problem Solving Abilities and Social Normative Skills.

Each contributing child variable was initially divided at the median. Scores falling within the semi-interquartile range were assigned a value of '2'; scores below, a value of '1'; scores above, a value of '3'. The three-point scale was used in an effort to maintain the original teacher and peer profiling system: "at risk" (1), "okay" (2), and "superstar status" (3) (3,4). Each area integration score was derived by arithmetically summing the values across related teacher and peer dimensions (2).

T-tests indicated significant differences between EH and NEH groups for the two behavioral domains: Academic Problem Solving Abilities ($t= 4.72$, $p.<.001$) and Social Normative Skills ($t= 3.01$, $p.<.01$).

It would appear that by combining the social as well as cognitive behavioral domains, these separate indices can yield robust measures for analysis of school-related competencies. In this study both functioned to differentiate the groups significantly.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has demonstrated how the RTRS and RPRS functioned to discriminate between the male EH and NEH children at the Holcomb Learning Center. While generalization to other school settings is not appropriate because of sampling limitations, this study provides a criterion-referenced validation of these assessment profiling procedures for determining and comparing children's school-related behavioral competencies. Hueristically, the study generates data for the Geneseo Part III and Part IV studies described earlier in this paper.

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